World's Greatest Fisherman Lives in Washington

His Name Is Dr. Hugh McCormick Smith, and He Is Commissioner of Fisheries of the United States Government—Fishing Grounds That Extend Over the Country and Into the Oceans.

THE greatest fisherman in the world is a citizen of Washington. His name is Dr. Hugh McCormick Smith. His job (not position) is commissioner of fisheries of the United States government.

The average Washington fisherman feels that he is getting much out of life by now and then casting a hook and line into the tidal basin as he leisurely dangles his legs from the stone wall surrounding that expansive and citified pond. To take a trip down the bay and land a few big ones gives the angler material for conversation for the remainder of the year.

That is wherein Dr. Smith's fishing activities differ from other Washingtonians. His fishing grounds extend to every county in every state in the Union, and to as much of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and contiguous waters as he may legally browse about in.

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It is claimed that Dr. Smith knows more different kinds of fish than any other person on earth. And the wonderful part of it is that he knows them either by their real names or the outlandish unpronounceable appellations given them by scientific gentlemen, who evidently enjoy talking much more than fishing. On the walls of Dr. Smith's suite of offices in the main fisheries building at 6th street and Maine avenue, can be seen hundreds of pictures of bright-hued fish of designs that would indicate the combined efforts of an artist of the cubist-futurist brand and a Washington architect of the gargoyle period of architectural affliction.

Waiting fifteen or twenty minutes in the commissioner's outer office, with nothing but fish scenery of that kind to gaze upon, is rather disturbing. But when his secretary finally ushers you into the inner sanctum and introduces the commissioner as "Dr." Smith you are decidedly disconcerted. The word "doctor" carries many meanings. When this mild-mannered man looks up from his desk, piled high with applications for fish, no man on earth could tell whether he was sizing up his caller from the viewpoint of an operation, salvation or fish.

The soaring prices of steaks, chops, bacon and poultry bring no lines of worry or disappointment to the features of this particular member of the prolific Smith family. While others rave about the high cost of meat Dr. Smith smiles and admonishes the populace to raise more fish and eat more fish. As proof of the fact that he practices at least half of what he preaches, he estimates that during the present year he will distribute a total of 6,000,000,000 stock fish throughout the United States. Since the close of the war, for some unexplainable reason, people everywhere seem to be more interested in fish than ever before in the history of the fisheries bureau. It is believed that requests made through the 435 members of Congress this year for fish for stocking purposes will reach 15,000. This means that through the fisheries department practically every pond, lake, creek and river in the United States, from Sanford, Me., to San Diego, Calif., will be stocked with fish of varieties best suited to climatic conditions of each locality.

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The day will ultimately arrive when the art of fishing will again come into its own, and that form of healthful and exciting outdoor sports will supplant more laborious and mirthless occupations. If Dr. Smith continues to hold down that important job for a few years longer practically every man in America living a hundred yards beyond the boundary lines of any city will be able to slip out to a nearby pond or creek any morning and in a few minutes catch a nice mess of fresh fish for the family breakfast. Let it not be inferred for a single moment that Dr. Smith is so partial to the country fishermen that he is overlooking the millions of people in the cities whose appetites become assertive three times daily. All of the large cities are either located near the coasts, on the great lakes or on good sized rivers. It therefore becomes necessary to develop and encourage commercial fishing upon an extensive scale. This is being done to a far greater extent than is generally known.

Rural inventive geniuses frequently present unique schemes to the head of the bureau for delivering fish from the coast to the interior cities. A chap down in Texas wrote a twenty-page letter to the commissioner showing him in minute detail how and why the government ought to build sixteen-inch pipe lines from the ocean to far-away places and pump the live fish through them to a central market pond at each place. In proof of the soundness of his plan, he tells of an eel that traveled through the town water main, finally plugging his kitchen plumbing, necessitating an expenditure of $7.63.

COD CAUGHT IN TWENTY MINUTES WITH HAND-LINES NEAR KODIAK, ALASKA, FROM SHIP ALBATROSS
(Photos by U. S. Fish Commission.)

A young man from Chicago who served in the air service duing the war suggests that airplanes be fitted with water tanks so that live fish, oysters and lobsters could be delivered to all sections of the country.

During the war the funds and employes of the fisheries bureau were largely diverted to the task of introducing fish in carload lots to states that previously depended almost entirely on fresh beef. Within two months after the starting of such efforts a total of 200,000 pounds of fish had been shipped from the gulf coast alone into such states as Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana. In order to bring newly introduced fish or other products to the attention of the consuming public, it was found necessary to conduct a systematic and well-sustained advertising campaign. By the issuance and wide distribution of posters and placards devoted to particular fish, by having the newer products tested by workers skilled in the art of cooking to determine the best methods of preparation for the table, and by the printing in inexpensive form of cook books embodying the results of tests, the bureau was able to interest a large number of people in the merits of water products with which they were previously unacquainted.

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A still more direct appeal was made to the public through the employment of well-qualified demonstrators for the purpose of educating housewives in fish cookery, teaching them to recognize the qualities of each kind of fish and prepare it in the manner best suited to its character, and showing how to utilize heads, bones and other waste parts for savory soups, sauces and chowders On the Pacific coast the demonstrations were exceedingly popular and well patronized. Local fish dealers reported much larger sales of cheap fish in consequence of this work. Plans are being perfected for the extension of this service to all parts of the country.

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As a result of Dr. Smith's experiments in increasing the nation's food supply, it is quite possible that in the very near future it will be the rage for members of President Wilson's cabinet, members of Congress and the public generally to drop in at some restaurant of an evening and feast on such dainties as roast whale, baked shark or stewed porpoise. The value of sharks as food has long been recognized in the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, in Great Britain, Japan and many other countries. Until recently their use for food in the United States has been limited mainly to seafaring people in scattered localities, and to the markets of some of the larger cities, where they are often sold under the name of more expensive fishes.

It has been demonstrated that porpoises and dolphins are excellent food, some people preferring them to whale meat. The government authorities have been instrumental in bringing the value of these forms to the attention of fishermen on the Atlantic and gulf coasts, and progress is being made in the establishment of markets for the meat of these creatures. It appears that the oily taste, which may be more or less objectionable to some, can be avoided by removing the connective tissue which lies between the blubber and the meat.

For years and years uplifters and orators have been lavishly praising those hustling agriculturalists who "made two blades of grass grow where only one grew before." The accomplishments of Dr. Smith have made the grass-growing gentry look small. He has accomplished the remarkable feat of making hundreds of thousands of lobsters grow where absolutely none grew before. It dawned upon him one day that in the construction of the Pacific coast nature had entirely overlooked the important item of supplying lobsters (of the edible kind) for the populace. To overcome this slight and to see that the native sons and daughters of California, Oregon and Washington had a chance once in a while to surprise their stomachs with fancy food, Dr. Smith went up to Boothbay harbor, Me., and selected 6,000 fine lobsters, equally divided as to sex, and shipped them to the Pacific coast, where they were liberated. The experiment has proven successful beyond all expectations. By packing the lobsters in shallow boxes, upon beds of straw that had been previously soaked in strong brine, it was found they could stand the trip across the continent without difficulty.

Another experiment conducted by "the world's greatest fisherman" may soon result in fashionable young men and women of Washington and elsewhere arraying themselves in gloves and shores made from the hides of sharks and other fish. Experiments with that end in view have been taken up with tanners. Especially constructed nets are also being devised for the purpose of catching sharks in large numbers.

For the survey of offshore fishing grounds, the study of pelagic fishes, and the general exploration of the seas, Dr. Smith utilizes the famous steamer Albatross, which was especially designed and built for this work in 1882. This boat is credited with having contributed more to the knowledge of the life and physics of the sea than any other vessel. The Albatross is a twin screw iron steamer, rigged as a brigantine, of 1,074 tons displacement. The complement of officers and men, numbering eighty, is furnished by the Navy. There is in addition a small civilian staff, including a resident naturalist and fishery expert, to whom the practical work of the ship is intrusted.

After spending several years in the investigation of the fishing grounds of the Atlantic coast of North America, the Albatross was dispatched to the Pacific ocean in 1888 and continued fishing operations until the breaking out of the war with Germany, when she and all other boats belonging to the bureau were turned over to Secretary Daniels to be used in the job of subduing the Huns. The vessel made extended cruises to the southern and eastern parts of the Pacific, several cruises to the Hawaiian Islands and Japan, and many visits to Alaska, in addition to numerous surveys on the coast of the Pacific states, all having for their object the investigation of the physics and biology of the regions visited, the determination of their aquatic resources and the study of their fisheries. A biological survey was also made of the waters of the Philippine archipelago.

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Work similar to that done by the Albatross is conducted by the steamer Fish Hawk on the Atlantic coast. This vessel was built for the bureau in 1879 and is of 441 gross tons burden.

The bureau's large collection of natural history specimens are deposited in the National Museum. It is by far the finest collection in the world. The duplicates are not retained for government purposes, but are distributed upon request to public schools and colleges. In this way hundreds of thousands of specimens, representing all groups of aquatic animals, have been supplied for educational purposes.

While co-operating with Surgeon General Rupert Blue of the United States public health service, Dr. Smith developed the amazing discovery that fish could be used to advantage in waging campaigns against malaria. In talking of this phase of his work he said:

"With the measures that are generally relied upon for the control of the abundance of mosquitoes and the eradication of malaria, this bureau has no direct concern. They lie within the domian of sanitation and entomology. It may be said, however, that it has become very clear to all concerned that under many conditions the direct methods of sanitary science generally employed in combating the mosquito, whether physical, chemical or engineering, either are not practicable of application, or when applied, fail of accomplishing the desired purpose. It has been found necessary in many cases to rely to a great extent upon nature's method of controlling the abundance of organisms through their competitors and enemies. It is well known, however, that nature's control of the abundance of mosquitoes, as of other animals and plants generally, is relative and not absolute. The problem in this case is to find means of making the enemies of mosquito larvae dominant over their natural prey, of making them efficient in the extermination of the larvae of anophelid mosquitoes at least.

"The problem is primarily within the domain of aquatic biology and concerns especially the small mosquito-eating fishes and other associates, and in this problem, in its phases both of investigation and of practical work, the assistance of the bureau of fisheries was solicited by the bureau of entomology and the public health service, both located in Washington.

"The co-operation with the public health service was principally in the urgent task of protecting the health of soldiers in a cantonment near Augusta, Ga. The plan of work comprised the use of all available means of protecting and increasing the supply of top minnows in the area under protection, and the careful observation of the effectiveness of these and other fish in the extermination of mosquito larvae. To increase the number of minnows in the cantonment area, propagation was resorted to and fish were also brought in from places outside the protected zone.

"It has been fully demonstrated that the small fish in many cases are most effective agents for the control of mosquitoes, but it has also been positively ascertained that the efficiency of fish even when present in abundance is by no means universal and complete. Much depends upon the physical and biological conditions in the water, such as the presence of debris and of plants of various specie, wave action, fluctuations of level and various other factors.

"The Gambusia fishes used in these experiments are unique in that they do not lay eggs, but give birth to well developed and very active young."

THE LARGEST SEINE IN THE WORLD, OPERATED FOR SHAD AND ALEWIVES AT STONY POINT, VA., ON THE POTOMAC RIVER. THE NET IS 9,600 FEET IN LENGTH AND THE HAULING ROPES ARE 22,400 FEET LONG, GIVING 32,000 FEET AS THE TOTAL SWEEP OF THE SEINE.